

at us, at least I want them to have an accurate perception. [*Laughter*] If they think we have a certain policy or a certain attitude, I want them to have an accurate view of what that policy or attitude is. And it's a constant effort, but I appreciate that.

I wonder if—I promised this gentleman in the back I'd call on him, but we have some people here from different religious traditions, from East Asia or South Asia who have not spoken. I wonder if any of them would like to be heard before we go.

Go ahead, sir.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. First of all, I strongly support what was done in South Africa. And I have tried on various occasions to do that for the Japanese who were interned here during the war, for the African-Americans that were subject to the Tuskegee experiments. And I wish you would work with our people, and let's try to give some shape to what your thinking is.

I do believe that it's—I was thrilled that you mentioned that old debate between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, because when people look at John Adams, they sort of have this preconceived notion of what he was like and what Jefferson was like. You would think that Jefferson was arguing for passion, and Adams was arguing for reason. And it was actually the other way around, which is maybe just their own form of denial, who knows? [*Laughter*]

But anyway, it was a great debate. And I agree that this is fundamentally a problem of the heart.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Thank you. Let me say, I want to have a chance to greet you all individually, so we're going to have to break up. I do want to say, Bishop, that I don't believe I'll ever forget that remark that without followers, a leader is just a person out on a walk. [*Laughter*] Without you and some of our friends of the last couple years, I would have been taking a lot of walks. [*Laughter*] So I thank you for that.

I want to end this on a high note, if I might, since we're here talking about one America. After a 4-year wait, Judge Richard Paez, a Hispanic judge from California, of

the Mormon faith, and Marsha Berzon were confirmed by the United States Senate today.

They got the highest rating by the American Bar Association, and they added to the diversity of the bench. This week Judge Julio Fuentes of New Jersey was also confirmed. So I think maybe we're, by fits and starts, moving toward our one America. And we will work with you more.

I look forward to seeing you all individually. Thank you very much.

Oh, wait. We've got to have a benediction, and this is my fault. Tell them to stop the music. [*Laughter*]

Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste. I would like to have Jake Swamp from the Mohawks lead us in closing prayer.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sanford Cloud, Jr., president and chief executive officer, National Conference for Community and Justice; John Hope Franklin, former Chair, and Judith A. Winston, former Executive Director and member, President's Initiative on Race; Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom; Eric Lander, director, Whitehead/MIT Center for Genome Research; and Bishop Chandler Owens, Church of God in Christ. The President also referred to West African immigrant Amadou Diallo, who died after being shot in the Bronx Borough of New York City by four police officers, who were acquitted of all criminal charges on February 25 in Albany, NY. Ms. Echaveste referred to Jake Swamp, founder, Tree of Peace Society. The conference was formally entitled, "The President's One America Meeting With Religious Leaders."

Statement on the Treasury Department's Debt Buyback

March 9, 2000

Today we reached another historic landmark in our fiscal turnaround. For the first time in 70 years, the U.S. Treasury Department completed a "debt buyback." This buyback of debt is a striking reminder of the extraordinary progress we have made in putting America's fiscal house in order. In the last 7 years, we moved from the largest deficit in history to the largest surplus in history.

America is now on track to pay down nearly \$300 billion in debt by the end of this year and to be debt-free by 2013. In this new era of surpluses, these “debt buybacks” will help us continue to pay down the debt, save money for American taxpayers, and lift the burden of interest payments off our children and grandchildren.

Statement on Senate Action on Judicial Nominations

March 9, 2000

Today the Senate finally confirmed, after 4 years, Judge Richard Paez and, after 2 years, Marsha Berzon to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Both of these candidates bring extraordinary experience and diversity to the bench, both received the American Bar Association’s highest rating, both were approved by solid bipartisan majorities today, but unfortunately both were forced to wait far too long to receive votes.

This week the Senate also confirmed Judge Julio Fuentes of New Jersey, who becomes the first Hispanic to serve on the Third Circuit. Judge Fuentes had to wait a year for his vote, but when it finally came, he was approved unanimously by a vote of 93 to 0.

I want to thank the Senate for moving this process forward. But I want to repeat that dozens of qualified judicial nominees still await confirmation. Meanwhile, caseloads rise and backlogs mount. These fine Americans have offered themselves to serve our country—and they are entitled to an up or down vote. Election year politics should not be used as an excuse to slow down the confirmation process.

This is a good day for our country. But we must keep going. It’s what our nominees deserve and what justice demands.

Statement on Minimum Wage Legislation

March 9, 2000

The minimum wage must be raised but not with a bill that stacks the deck against America’s working families. This bill repeals

key overtime protections, could reduce pension coverage for many families, and includes risky tax giveaways that threaten our prosperity and the future of Social Security and Medicare. Once again, Republicans in the House of Representatives have demonstrated that they would rather fight for special interests than give working families the raise they deserve.

I will veto the bill Republicans in the House passed tonight if it comes to my desk. Congress should send me a bill I can sign: a clean straightforward bill that raises the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Report on Federal Advisory Committees

March 9, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

As provided by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), as amended (Public Law 92–463; 5 U.S.C., App. 2, 6(c)), I hereby submit the *Twenty-seventh Annual Report on Federal Advisory Committees*, covering fiscal year 1998.

In keeping with my commitment to create a more responsive government, the executive branch continues to implement my policy of maintaining the number of advisory committees within the ceiling of 534 required by Executive Order 12838 of February 10, 1993. Accordingly, the number of discretionary advisory committees (established under general congressional authorizations) was again held to substantially below that number. During fiscal year 1998, 460 discretionary committees advised executive branch officials. The number of discretionary committees supported represents a 43 percent reduction in the 801 in existence at the beginning of my Administration.

Through the planning process required by Executive Order 12838, the total number of advisory committees specifically mandated by statute also continues to decline. The 388 such groups supported at the end of fiscal year 1998 represents a modest decrease from the 391 in existence at the end of fiscal year 1997. However, compared to the 439 advisory committees mandated by statute at the